

# Safety Operations Holiday Newsletter

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## “Tis The Season for Holiday Safety

The holidays have arrived with all their laughter, lights and festive decorations. But it is too easy to become caught up in the excitement of holiday decorating and overlook the potential hazards of decorations.

Whether you are putting up a Christmas tree or lighting the Menorah or Kwanza candles, taking the following suggestions can help make your holidays more joyful and safe:

**Christmas Trees** - consider an artificial tree that is “fire resistant” as they are much safer and cleaner; keep your tree in a container full of water and check it daily ( it is recommended to cut one inch from the trunk to help absorb water); use a wide-based stand to make sure the tree is secure and will not fall over; cover the tree pan with a tree skirt or blanket; keep the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, radiators and heating vents; place a tree in a location so that it does not block an exit; cut back the lower branches to avoid eye injuries to small children. Keep ornaments that are breakable; that may contain small, detachable parts; metal hooks; or that look like food or candy on branches where small children cannot reach them (pieces could be swallowed or inhaled). Never burn Christmas tree branches, treated wood or wrapping paper in your fireplace; and dispose of your tree promptly after the holidays.

If you choose to purchase a natural tree, choose a fresh one as it will stay green longer and be less of a fire hazard than a

dry tree. To determine freshness, remember: a fresh tree is green; fresh needles are hard to pull from the branches; when bent between your fingers, fresh needles do not break; the trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin; and when the trunk of a tree is bounced on the ground, there is not a shower of falling needles

**Holiday Trimmings and Food** - keep small ornaments, tinsel, small figurines and other decorations away from a child’s reach (children have a tendency to put everything in their mouths); use only flame-resistant or non-combustible materials; wear gloves while decorating with spun glass “angel hair” to avoid irritation to eyes and skin; choose tinsel or artificial icicles or plastic or non-leaded metals; never place trimmings near open flames or electrical connections; and keep round, hard foods and candies such as candy cane pieces, mints, nuts and popcorn out of the reach of young children.

**Poisons** - keep poisonous plants out of the reach of children and pets (Holly and mistletoe berries are very poisonous if eaten. Other poisonous holiday plants are: amaryllis, azalea, boxwood, Christmas rose, Crown of Thorns, English ivy and Jerusalem cherry. Poinsettias are not poisonous, but they can cause skin irritation and gastrointestinal distress. Avoid artificial snow sprays as they can cause lung irritation if inhaled. Fire salts used in fireplaces to produce colored

flames contain heavy metals and cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten; common baking ingredients such as vanilla and almond extract contain high levels of alcohol and may be harmful to young children; do not leave alcoholic drinks unattended as they can be harmful if consumed by children. Ipecac syrup kept in the home should only be used on the advice of a poison control center or a physician.

Remember to keep poison control center and emergency medical service phone numbers by all telephones. Also remember to leave a phone number for babysitters so they can reach you if you go out to a holiday party.

**General Holiday Safety** - crime escalates each year between Thanksgiving and Christmas. You are at risk when shopping in a mall, using the ATM, walking through a parking lot, or driving your car. “Keep your eyes open and your antennas up”, and always be aware of your surroundings and alert to what is going on around you.

*The holidays are a stressful time of year. Plan ahead, take your time shopping and have a holiday season that is merry and safe.*

## Did you know?

**That the first Thanksgiving wasn’t really celebrated by the Pilgrims, but was instead celebrated by Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado in Texas in 1541?**

**That erasers were invented in 1770 and lead pencils in 1795, and it was nearly 100 years before the two were put together and patented in 1858.**



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***“The holidays are a time of celebration, but they should also be one of making safety a priority. Fires can start for a variety of reasons and the results can be tragic. “***



***“Fatigue can be as deadly as drinking and driving. Get a good night’s rest before the start of your trip and if you are tired, pull over and rest. Make sure your car is in good condition and ready for a trip. Check you windshield wipers, tires and brakes”.***

## Fire Safety Tips for the Holidays

The holidays are a time of celebration, but they should also be one of making safety a priority. Fires can start for a variety of reasons and the results can be tragic. Unfortunately, the rush to get everything done sometimes means that we compromise on our care to prevent fires and accidents in the home. The following suggestions can help to prepare us for the holidays:

**Christmas Lights** - purchase only UL (Underwriters’ Lab Inc.) approved holiday lights and check all indoor and outdoor lights for frayed cords and replace as needed; never use outdoor lights inside the home; use mini-lights as they produce the least amount of heat; use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord; never use electric lights on a metallic tree; turn off all lights on trees and other decorations when you go to bed or leave the house (lights could short and start a fire); never run an extension cord under a carpet (they may become damaged and overheat causing a fire); secure electrical cords so that chil-

dren cannot pull them and topple the tree; unplug lights from electrical outlets before changing bulbs; don’t staple through electrical cords or light strings as you could damage the wire or insulation, leading to a serious shock or fire.

**Candles** - do not use candles near flammable materials or where they can be knocked over or reached by small children or family pets; do not leave candles unattended; keep candles out of the reach of children; do not place candles near draperies or anything that might easily catch fire; and place candles in sturdy, non-flammable holders or containers.

**Cook With Care** - always turn pot handles in so small children can’t grab them; don’t store items on the stove top as they could catch fire; keep kitchen appliances clean and in good condition and turn them off after use; don’t use appliances with frayed or cracked wires.

**Safeguards** - if you have a fireplace, have it cleaned periodically and use a sturdy screen that covers

the entire area; keep matches out of the fireplace area as small children may find them and attempt to light the fireplace; store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container; never hand stockings next to an open fire; keep space heaters away from the tree, presents, curtains and bedding materials and remember to turn them off before leaving the house; avoid wearing loose flowing clothes near open flames (fireplace, stove, or candlelit table); store paper, kindling, and other flammable material at least three feet from the fireplace; and make sure that your home is equipped with working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

***Don’t get burned by Christmas! Make safety a priority and have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.***

## Traffic Safety for the Holidays

The holiday season is all around us - the leaves on the trees have changed color and are falling to the ground, daylight savings time has returned, Christmas music is on the radio, Christmas trees are for sale, holiday decorations abound, and the temperature has begun to fall. Along with these changes are a sense of expectation, overloaded schedules and the potential for increased stress and accidents. People will be traveling to share the holiday with family and friends, often long distances, some facing winter weather and, sometimes, celebrating with alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately, with this comes the reality that this joyous

season could be marked by tragedy and sorrow.

Each year winter holiday traffic incidents and fatalities rise across the nation. During 2004, approximately 820 people died during this time with 45 per cent of these fatalities involving an impaired driver. In fact, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death in the United States for all age groups from 1 through 34 years.

When drinking and driving, the message is simple - if you are going to drink, then don’t drive. Stay out of the driver’s seat, and don’t be a passenger in a vehicle when some-

one else has been drinking. You have a choice - stay where you are, use a designated driver, or call a cab.

Another way of protecting yourself is to wear your seat belt or helmet. Children are required to be secured in child safety seats. Law enforcement agencies will be stepping up enforcement of the seat belt laws during the holidays through the Click It or Ticket Campaign.

***Safety is no accident, and having no accidents will help to ensure that you and your family have a joyous holiday season.***

## Holiday Toy Safety

The start of the holiday season means the start of the toy buying season. In fact, approximately 50 per cent of toys are bought between the months of September and December. Most toys are safe, but they can become dangerous if misused or they fall into the hands of children who are too young to play with them.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) urges gift-givers to keep safety in mind when choosing toys for children. They estimate that more than 121,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries each year. The Child Safety Protection Act, a federal toy labeling law, requires manufacturers to place warning labels on toys that pose a choking hazard to young children.

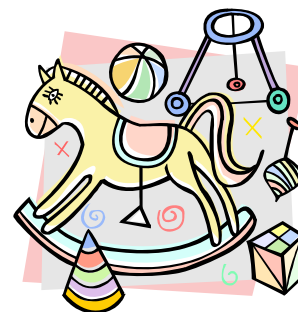
The following safety tips will help parents and consumers to select appropriate toys for the holiday season: select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills, and interest level of the child (toys too advanced may pose safety hazards to younger children); for infants, toddlers, and all children who still mouth objects, avoid toys with small parts which could pose a fatal choking hazard; for all children under age eight, avoid toys that have sharp edges and points; do not purchase electric toys with heating elements for children under age eight; be a label reader (look for labels that give age recommendations and use that information as a guide); look for sturdy construction, such as tightly secured eyes, noses, and other potential small parts; check instructions making sure they are clear to you, and when appropriate, to the

child; and discard plastic wrappings on toys immediately, which can cause suffocation, before they become deadly playthings.

Bicycles, in-line skates, scooters, skateboards and sleds are also popular gifts for the holidays. But remember, without the proper protective gear or skills, injury and death can occur. Include a helmet, pads and guards as part of the gift.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission's toll-free telephone hotline at 1-800-638-2772 will provide information about recalled products and information on what to look for when buying products.

*"We can help prevent toy-related injuries and deaths by using common sense, always reading the labels and being safety conscious".*



**The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 121,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries each year.**

## Holiday Safety for Pets

The aroma of a fresh turkey in the oven, stuffing and pumpkin pie cooling on the kitchen counter - the scents and pleasures of the holiday season. Suddenly there is a crash and a clatter, and you look just in time to see the dog and the holiday turkey disappearing down the hallway!! The holidays are a time when people gather to enjoy eating food and spending time with family and friends. This is also a prime time for a scenario such as above to occur which can lead to a sick animal and a trip to the veterinarian.

According to Dr. Kent Davis, a veterinarian at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital, "Sometimes pets sneak treats that they shouldn't, but many pet owners also give the pets a little of whatever they are having because they want to include their pets in the festivities of the holidays. While these pet owners have good inten-

tions, feeding pets foods that they are unaccustomed to can lead to gastrointestinal upset and food-related veterinarian visits."

Chocolate toxicity is a major problem seen during the holidays as it can cause severe heart problems and is toxic to almost all animals. Baking chocolate is more lethal than milk chocolate. Foods that are high-fat or high-sugar are a sure bet to get an animal into trouble.

Seasonal decorations are as dangerous for our pets as is food: if a dog is the type to chew, then he/she may decide to chew on the electrical cord connected to the Christmas tree giving him or her burns on the face and tongue; cats like shiny things and may eat ornaments causing them to develop symptoms that require surgical correction or they can get tangled in them causing a strangulation risk.

Pets have been known to tip over Christmas trees resulting in potential fire hazards. Don't leave tree lights plugged in or candles lit unless someone is nearby. Keeping wires out of reach or out of view and placing the Christmas tree on a pedestal can reduce risks.

An animal often sees the tree stand as a drinking bowl, so avoid using tree preservatives and chemicals in the stand as most of them have some form of toxicity. Some animals are fond of eating houseplants. The poinsettia, holly and mistletoe are poisonous holiday plants that will cause vomiting and diarrhea if consumed.

*The holidays are full of dangers for our pets, but with some foresight and common sense, we can minimize the hazards in our home and make the holidays a joyous time for all.*

*"Six pieces of kiss-sized baking chocolate is a lethal dose for a 20 pound dog. Stick to treats that are made for our 4-legged companions."*



## IS IT A COLD OR IS IT THE FLU?

You are home from work with a fever, **you're** sneezing, **you're** coughing and **your** energy has up and left you. You ask yourself - do I have a cold or do I have the flu? Colds and flu are caused by different viruses and because these two illnesses have similar flu-like symptoms, it can be difficult to tell the difference based on the symptoms alone.

Colds are usually milder than the flu and last about a week. The symptoms one experiences are more likely to be sneezing, a runny or stuffy nose, malaise and no fever. Colds can occur at any time of the year, often at a change of season.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness with symptoms such as: a moderate to high fever, muscle aches, sore throat, headache, dry cough and extreme tiredness. The

flu appears almost exclusively during the winter months.

Cold and flu viruses are spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing that enter the body through the nose and mouth. You cannot be cured of the cold or flu once you get it, but most healthy people successfully recover on their own and develop some degree of immunity to subsequent infections. However, one with the flu can begin to infect others one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick.

***Therefore, that means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.***

Antibiotics will not cure a cold or flu as they are only effective against

bacteria, which is different from viruses. But, one may prevent the flu by getting a flu vaccination each year. Why do you need to get the flu shot yearly? Because the viruses that cause the flu change their characteristics every year. Different strains appear every year, so that one year's immunity is not completely effective the next year. Anyone who wants to reduce their chances of getting the flu should get vaccinated. If you have questions or concerns, one should always check with their physician.

***Prevention remains the best way to avoid colds and flu and the most effective means are: wash your hands frequently; avoid close contact with infected persons; and dispose of tissues immediately.***



***Flu Shots are available thru 12/31/05 in the HQC Occupational Health Unit, Rm.1739:***

***Mon-Thu 9:00-12:30***

***2:30-3:30***

***Fri 9:00-12:30 only***

## The Importance of Handwashing

In fact, this is why we are in debt to Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis who first demonstrated over a hundred years ago that routine handwashing can prevent the spread of disease. In Vienna, maternity patients were dying at an alarming rate and Dr. Semmelweis discovered that medical students were not washing their hands after anatomy class and were transferring bacteria to the maternity patients during their rounds. Students were asked to wash their hands before treating the new mothers and the deaths on the maternity ward fell fivefold. This marked the beginning of infection control. Unfortunately, it took another 50 years before the importance of handwashing as a preventive measure would be widely accepted by the medical profession.

This landmark achievement has prompted healthcare specialists to generally cite handwashing as the single most effective way to prevent the transmission of disease in healthcare settings, in communities, in schools, in child care settings, and in

eating establishments.

By frequently washing your hands, you wash away germs that you have picked up from other people, contaminated surfaces, or from animals and animal waste. We pick up germs from other sources and then infect ourselves when we touch our eyes, our nose or our mouth. The best way to catch a cold is by rubbing our nose or eyes after our hands have been contaminated with the cold virus. We can spread germs directly to others or onto surfaces that other people touch. And before we know it, everybody around us is getting sick.

Serious diseases such as hepatitis A, meningitis, and infectious diarrhea can also be prevented if people make a habit of washing their hands. It is estimated that one out of three people do not wash their hands after using the restroom.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) suggest the following tips for when one should wash their hands: before, during, and after you prepare

food (germs are transmitted from unclean hands to food and then passed to those who eat the food); before you eat, and after you use the bathroom; after handling animals or animal waste; when your hands are dirty; and frequently when someone in your home is sick.

The CDC also suggests that when we wash our hands, we: first wet our hands and apply liquid or clean bar soap; rub our hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces; continue for 10-15 seconds (it is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs); and rinse well and dry our hands.

***Dr. Semmelweis's discovery has helped save thousands of lives over the years, but it is our frequent handwashing that will help to keep us from getting sick and prevent the spread of infectious diseases to others!***



***"Handwashing has been cited as the single most effective way to prevent the transmission of disease in healthcare settings, in communities, in schools, in child care settings, and in eating establishments."***